

COUNTY OF YORK

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 27, 2000 (BOS Mtg. 4/18/00)

TO: York County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Daniel M. Stuck, County Administrator

SUBJECT: Application No. UP-555-00, Kenneth Dale Moore

ISSUE:

Application No. UP-555-00 requests a special use permit pursuant to Section 24.1-306 (Category 14, No. 6) to authorize the construction of a mini-storage warehouse facility on the south side of Hampton Highway (Route 134) near its intersection with Big Bethel Road (Route 600). The parcel is further identified as Assessor's Parcel No. 37-158.

DESCRIPTION

- Property Owner: A.B. Southall, Jr.
- Location: Hampton Highway (Route 134), approximately 815 feet east of its intersection with Big Bethel Road (Route 600).
- Area: 4.5 acres of a 9.75 acre parent tract
- Frontage: Approximately 400 feet on Hampton Highway (Route 134)
- Utilities: Public water and sewer
- Topography: Flat
- 2015 Land Use Map Designation: General Business
- Zoning Classification: GB – General Business
- Existing Development: None
- Surrounding Development:
 - North: Hampton Highway; Single-family residences beyond
 - East: Bethel Manor housing complex
 - South: Belmont Apartments (under construction)
 - West: Big Bethel Road
- Proposed Development: Mini-storage warehouse facility

CONSIDERATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

1. The applicant is requesting a special use permit to construct a mini-storage warehouse facility on approximately 4.5 acres of an approximately 9.75-acre parent tract along Hampton Highway (Route 134). The Comprehensive Plan designates this area as General Business and the parcel is zoned GB – General Business. The applicant proposes to construct approximately 60,000 square feet of storage space contained within 14 storage buildings and an office and manager's residence building.
2. The subject parcel is a 1,600-foot-long, 300-foot-wide parcel that runs along Route 134 and behind a single-family residence and the Exxon station at the intersection of Hampton Highway and Big Bethel Road (Route 600). The applicant plans to subdivide the 9.75-acre parcel into three portions, with a car wash proposed on the portion adjacent to Big Bethel Road, the proposed mini-storage warehouse development on the middle portion, and an undetermined commercial development on the western piece. The property is within a General Business node that has been designated at the intersection of Hampton Highway and Big Bethel Road. The Comprehensive Plan is very specific in its emphasis on promoting nodal rather than strip commercial development along the Route 134 corridor:

“Additional commercial development in this area is proposed to be concentrated around the Big Bethel Road/Hampton Highway intersection. This type of nodal development has the advantages of limiting the number of curb cuts and encouraging an economically efficient concentration of uses on commercial sites. Small and scattered individual parcels, in contrast, hinder internal circulation, cause deterioration of roadway capacity and can create a “strip” commercial atmosphere. The preferred development within this node includes concentrations of commercial activity such as typically found in shopping centers and small office centers...”

This strategy for the Route 134 corridor dates back to the County's previous land use plans adopted in 1991, 1983, and 1976. The 1991 Comprehensive Plan had essentially the same language, while the 1983 Land Use Plan stated that “(a)s in the original Plan, a General Commercial designation has been located at the intersection of Route 134 and Big Bethel Road. This nodal designation is made in an effort to promote concentrated commercial development along Route 134 as opposed to the strip commercial development characteristic of other major thoroughfares in the County.” The 1976 Land Use Plan designates most of the Route 134 corridor for medium- and high-density residential development, with opportunities for “convenience shopping activities” at the Big Bethel Road intersection in accordance with the stated goals of “regulating strip commercial activities” and “regulating activities along major arterials.” More recently, the Board reaffirmed this strategy in its deliberations on the Comprehensive Plan update, particularly the sub-area description and land use designations as they relate to this intersection and the area surrounding it.

3. According to the applicant, this property was considered for development by a grocery store developer last year but was ultimately rejected because of the parcel's lack of

depth. Dissecting the parcel into three smaller ones to accommodate this proposal may further discourage other large businesses from locating on the site, thereby creating small and scattered parcels and promoting the “strip” commercial activity discouraged by the Comprehensive Plan. While the parcel’s current size and configuration may not be sufficient for a large grocery store operation, it should be able to support a small shopping center or retail store. Additionally, the portion of the parcel closest to Big Bethel Road is located behind two smaller parcels, both of which are zoned for General Business use. One of the two parcels is vacant and a nonconforming house is located on the other and it is likely that these two commercially zoned parcels will eventually be developed for commercial use. Were these two parcels combined with the subject parcel, one 360-foot-wide parcel with over 1,400 feet of frontage along Hampton Highway would be created, which should be large enough to attract a high caliber retail or office use.

4. In an effort to address the Board’s stated concerns with the lack of revenue generated by mini-storage warehouse developments, the applicant is proposing to construct 10,000 square feet of retail space that will be situated along the western portion of the property. Since the retail development is permitted as a matter of right in the General Business zoning district, it is not officially considered a part of this application and the application should be considered on the merits of the mini-storage warehouse development only. The fiscal impact study included with the application materials suggests that the addition of a retail element to this proposal will increase the tax revenue over what would be generated by a stand-alone mini-storage warehouse development. The fiscal impact assessment that was included with the application materials indicated the difference in tax revenue generated by several combinations of uses on the 4.5-acre parcel. As expected, all retail or combinations of uses that include a retail element were projected to generate the greatest amount of tax revenue.

While these proposed retail shops are not a part of this application, they would have an effect on the landscaping and screening. The retail merchants will presumably want improved visibility along Hampton Highway, and it should be anticipated that some permitted sight line clearing of the greenbelt would occur, which will place the mini-storage warehouses in clear view of eastbound Hampton Highway. It should be pointed out, however, that most of the existing landscaping would likely be removed if the entire parcel were developed for a retail use. Additionally, staff would not expect the developer to provide a landscape screen nearly as dense as the applicant has proposed. Should the Board choose to approve this application, staff recommends the inclusion of conditions to ensure that the retail shops are established prior to, or concurrent with, construction of the mini-storage development. Though the two elements should be considered as separate, this condition will help ensure that the mini-storage project is developed in a manner consistent with what is depicted on the conceptual drawing.

5. Mini-storage warehouses do not generate a large amount of traffic; in fact, the traffic generated by the proposed warehouses will most likely be less than what would be generated by any other commercial use. A goal of the *Transportation* element of the Comprehensive Plan is to “reduce peak-hour traffic congestion on major County

arteries.” The Plan does not, however, recommend that this goal be achieved at the expense of economic development. The applicant is proposing a direct access to Hampton Highway to serve the warehouse development and a direct access to Big Bethel Road to access the proposed car wash. The site has adequate room to accommodate the parking requirements (1.5 spaces per unit plus two for the manager residence) as set forth in the Zoning Ordinance.

6. Staff acknowledges that mini-storage facilities provide a service to nearby residents but feels that any request to establish a mini-storage facility along Route 134, which is a greenbelt corridor, should be accompanied by outstanding aesthetic and site treatments to protect and preserve the aesthetic integrity of this corridor. All sides of the proposed development will be visible to some extent from either Big Bethel Road or Hampton Highway. The applicant has provided a narrative description of the aesthetic treatment of the proposed development, including details of the building materials and colors. The colors and materials were chosen to complement the Belmont Apartment complex (under construction) behind the subject parcel.

Another application for a mini-storage facility near the subject parcel was brought before the Board in December 1999 and was denied. The previous applicant attempted to surpass the aesthetic standard set by many of the existing mini-storage developments in the County by providing superior building materials, façade treatments, colors, and similar attributes. The revised materials submitted by this applicant rival those submitted as part of the previous application for mini-storage on Route 134. The most significant features include gable-like structures on the storage buildings designed to break the visual monotony of 200-foot-long warehouse buildings, appealing colors and construction materials, and detailed conceptual and landscape plans. Staff anticipates that the finished product will be aesthetically superior to any existing mini-storage warehouse development in the County and believes that specific conditions can be included in an approving resolution to ensure that the finished product will closely resemble the conceptual plan.

7. The applicant has included a landscape plan and provided within the narrative a detailed description of the proposed landscaping and buffers. A portion of the property is directly adjacent to Route 134, which is designated as a greenbelt corridor; accordingly, a 35-foot-wide greenbelt buffer must be retained along that portion. The majority of the warehouse development extends behind a small, triangular shaped vacant parcel and a nonconforming house, both of which are adjacent to Hampton Highway. Neither of these two parcels can be considered as part of any buffer plan since they are not owned or controlled by the applicant and can be developed at any time. The applicant plans to landscape the 20-foot-wide perimeter buffer along this portion of the property in excess of the minimum requirements set forth in the Zoning Ordinance. The applicant also plans to retain all of the existing healthy trees within the 25-foot-wide transitional buffer at the rear of the property, which will provide a buffer ratio well beyond the County requirements. Similar treatments are proposed for the 10-foot-wide side yards. Staff believes that these buffers should provide adequate screening from the roadways and adjacent parcels and are likely in excess of what would be provided if the parcel were developed with a retail use. Should the Board

approve this application, staff has included conditions in the approving resolution that protect the existing healthy trees within these buffers and mirror the increased planting ratios described in the applicant's narrative.

8. The applicant has not provided a conceptual drawing of what the freestanding sign will look like should the application be approved. One of the problems with strip commercial development is the visual clutter caused by the proliferation of pylon signs along major corridors. Previous applications along this corridor have been encouraged by staff to have a ground-mounted monument-style sign rather than a pole-mounted sign, and staff feels that this request should not be treated any differently. Should this application be approved, staff recommends the inclusion of a condition requiring a brick or block, ground-mounted monument-style sign that is similar to the architecture of the proposed shopping center and mini-storage facility. This will set the standard for future commercial signage at this intersection and will help protect the visual character of this largely undeveloped corridor.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Commission considered this application following a public hearing on March 22, 2000. There were no citizens, other than the applicant and his agent, who spoke for or against the application. The Commission recommended denial by a vote of 4:1:2 (Garman and Lockwood abstaining, Semmes dissenting). The reasons to recommend denial related primarily to the inconsistency of this use with the Comprehensive Plan.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR RECOMMENDATION

Mini-storage warehouse facilities on commercial or industrial land, regardless of their location, represent a potential fiscal loss to the County when compared to what might have been located at that particular site in their stead. They do provide a service to residents and businesses in the area and, judging by the many past inquiries, the Route 134 corridor represents an untapped market. Applications for mini-storage warehouse facilities along Route 134 were brought before the Board at its August 4 and December 15, 1999 meetings. The August application involved rezoning property from a residential to a commercial designation in addition to a use permit. Noting the Comprehensive Plan's emphasis on promoting nodal rather than strip commercial development along the Route 134 corridor and mini-storage warehouses' lack of a significant fiscal benefit to the County (among other issues), staff and Planning Commission recommended denial. The Board of Supervisors ultimately denied the application. Staff recommended approval of the December 15 application, citing, among other things, the superior aesthetic treatments, lack of direct Hampton Highway access, and greatly improved landscaping plans. The Commission recommended approval, but the Board ultimately denied the request, noting that mini-storage warehouses did not further the County's economic goals and the lack of commercially zoned property along Route 134 placed the few vacant sites at a premium. Furthermore, the Board noted that the County should not be focused on the short-term market for property along Route 134 but should instead look at the long-term development potential of the corridor.

The proposed development would be an aesthetic improvement over any other mini-storage warehouse facility in the area. The applicant's proposed landscape plan exceeds the minimum requirements set forth in the Zoning Ordinance and should provide adequate screening from the adjacent parcels and roadways. However, these improvements do not eliminate the fact that mini-storage warehouses are low sources of revenue generation for the County and there is a lack of vacant commercial property along this corridor. Permitting this development on the largest vacant parcel at this commercial node will likely eliminate the possibility of attracting a higher caliber retail or office use at this node. Furthermore, subdividing and developing the subject parcel will reduce the desirability of the parcels in front of the warehouses and will promote further "strip" development. I am of the opinion that eliminating or risking the viability of a large portion of this commercial node for a use that generates limited revenue for the County is not what the Comprehensive Plan envisions. Therefore, I recommend denial. Should you choose to approve the application, however, Resolution R00-52 is attached.

Baldwin/3495.ppl

Attachments

- Excerpt, Planning Commission minutes, 3/22/00
- Zoning map
- Aerial map of the area
- Items provided by the applicant:
 - Conceptual drawing
 - Sketch plan
 - Fiscal impact analysis
 - Excerpt, Comprehensive Plan
 - Letter, Stephen D. Rich, Norcom Development, to Lamont D. Myers, 2/3/00
 - Conceptual grocery store plan
 - Letter, Pete Kotarides, The Kotarides Companies, to Lamont D. Myers, 1/25/00
- Proposed Resolution R00-52